

Spotlight on Green Communities

Whether they're purchasing renewable energy, recycling construction debris, or installing permeable paving, communities in northeastern Illinois are getting greener. On this page we're highlighting communities and park, conservation, and forest preserve districts willing to share their experiences with green practices.

Case Study: Village of Oswego Electronics Recycling

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For three hours every other Saturday, residents of the Village of Oswego bring telephones, radios, TVs, computers, and other recyclable electronics to the Village's public works facility. The goal is to keep electronic material from ending up in landfills, and since the first event in August 2007, the Village E-Recycle program has succeeded in preventing over 113 tons of electronics from doing just that.



Why We Need to Recycle Electronics

Improper disposal of electronics in landfills (e-waste) is hazardous because toxic substances such as mercury, cadmium, and some flame retardants can leach into and pollute soil and groundwater. An [Earth 911 study](#) found that e-waste is growing at three times the rate of other municipal waste, and that it may be responsible for as much as 70 percent of the heavy metals in landfills. A [2008 United States Environmental Protection Agency \(USEPA\) Report](#) found that of the 2.25 million tons of TVs, cell phones and computer products ready for end-of-life (EOL) management, 18% (414,000 tons) was collected for recycling and 82% (1.84 million tons) was disposed of, primarily in landfills.

The Groundwork

According to staff member Alison Giangrasse, the commissioners of Environmentally Conscious Oswego (ECO), advisors to the Village on environmental concerns, recognized the problem and sought and received a \$3600 grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) to get a program started. Applying for that grant meant calculating costs, figuring out where and how often to open the recycling facility, and who would pick up and process the electronics.

When they received the grant funds, the Village bought a 10' x 12' shed (as a frame of reference, Oswego's population is just over 29,000) for about \$2,000 and arranged payments to an electronics recycling firm (Vintage Tech, out of Plainfield) for pick up and processing, which amounted to about \$400 a month. Village staff and (ECO) commissioners volunteered their time to operate the recycling facility.

Giangrasse's advice to communities is to get the details down first – times, locations, fees and restrictions, and then "advertise, advertise, advertise!"

To get participation in the program, the Village set out to inform the community on the dangers and problems associated with dumping electronics in landfills and advertised the program to get participants. They put information in announcements and newsletters on the Village's website and published them in newspapers. They handed out brochures at community events. Now, every time they open the facility the volume of electronics increases.

Results

Giangrassse says the project was so overwhelmingly successful that the Village decided to find ways to keep it going when the grant money ran out: they increased the budget of the ECO Commission and now accept donations.

In January 2009 the Village hired an E-Recycle technician to make the program more efficient. Giangrassse says they collect more and more electronics every month and they now take electronics from non-residents, schools, and other institutions as well. The program is well organized; about 84 cars come though on a given Saturday and people are in and out fairly quickly in the three hours the facility is open. Plans are underway to purchase another shed to accommodate the amount of electronics delivered to the facility.

Giangrassse has some words of advice to communities interested in developing a program. She says it's important to get the logistics down before you start. Decide on event details such as times, locations, fees, and restrictions. Next, she says, is to advertise, advertise, advertise! Otherwise electronics will continue to go into landfills until people know they can recycle them.

For more information on the Village of Oswego's Electronics Recycling Program, contact Alison Giangrassse at 630.554.3622 or agiangrassse@oswegoil.org.



For more information on electronics recycling, go to:

http://www.epa.gov/waste/conserve/materials/ecycling/index.htm#_ftn1; and
<http://www.epa.gov/waste/conserve/materials/ecycling/pubs.htm#epa>.

Note: CMAP's Green Practices for Local Governments [Survey Report](#) of December 2009 found that one-third of responding communities manage electronic **and/or** hazardous waste on public property; five percent of respondents have a policy, incentive, or regulation on managing electronic waste.

Are there other green practice case studies you'd like to see? Is your community interested in being in the spotlight? Contact Lori Heringa by phone at 312-386-8621, or by email at lheringa@cmapp.illinois.gov.